

Name _____

Date _____

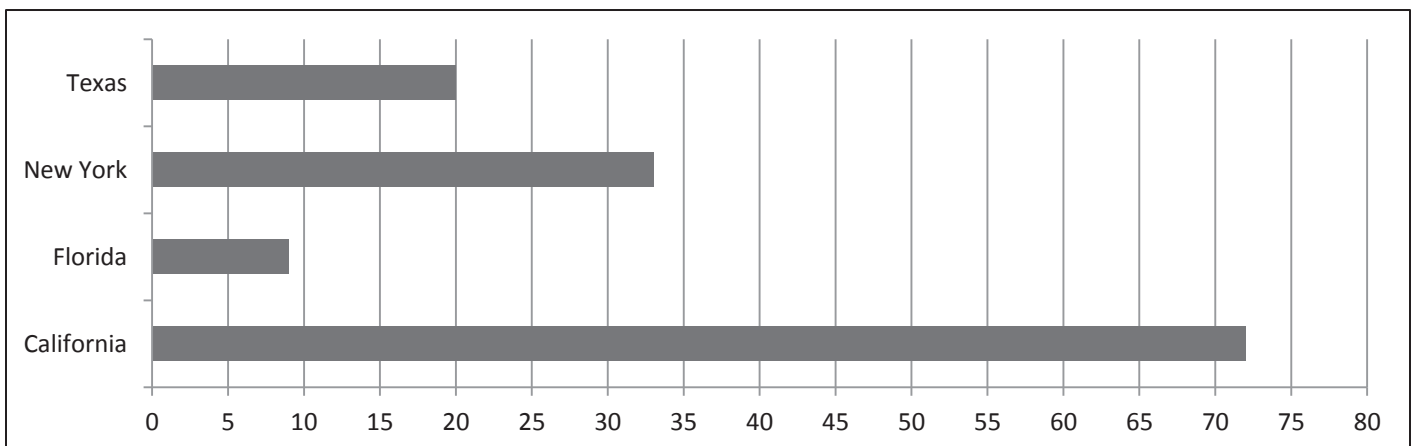
A Baby Boa?



- 1** You've probably seen photos of snake owners **beaming** with joy as their snake wraps around their shoulders. Snakes make great pets, right? If you're thinking about getting a baby boa, you may want to reconsider.
- 2** That beautiful two foot snake at the pet store won't stay small forever. Before you know it, you've got a 10 foot monster to manage. This means your boa is going to need a roomy cage. To provide comfortable **accommodations** to your scaly friend, you could be looking at giving up half of your living room! Oh, and don't forget, snakes are cold-blooded and are used to living in tropical, moist climates. Be prepared to leave a heat lamp on all the time and mist the tank frequently to maintain 60-70% humidity.
- 3** Now that your 10 foot friend is comfortable and warm, it's time to get him something to eat. Have you ever seen snake chow at the pet store? Nope. You can't go to a store and **purchase** a prepared food like you would for a guinea pig or mouse. Do you know what your boa likes to eat? Guinea pigs and mice. That's right, you're new pet eats other pets. Boa constrictors, like other snakes, are strict carnivores. They don't eat vegetables and prefer live food at \$10 to \$30 per meal. Too expensive!
- 4** Not only is feeding your snake costly, you're going to have to watch as he squeezes the life out of his prey and it's not a pretty sight. The good thing about your boa is that it isn't venomous. He may not have poison, but he knows how to kill his prey. Here's how it works. You'll drop a critter into your boa's cage. Then, he'll strike, clamp onto the 'food' with sharp teeth and wrap his body around the wriggling dinner, squeezing tight until the poor thing is unable to breathe, becomes still and dies. Then he'll swallow it whole and spend the rest of the week **digesting** his meal. Some might exclaim, "Well that's just the food chain. Snakes have to eat too!" Of course they do, and in the wild this works well. But placing a powerless rodent in a situation with no chance of escape just isn't fair. Oh, and you have to do this every week.

- 5 While you're in your crowded living room, monitoring the temperature in your boa's cage and dropping frightened animals in, you might notice that your boa's water bowl is dirty. Boas are known for using the restroom in their water bowls. Enjoy cleaning that up each day! When you're done, make sure to wash your hands. **Reptile** owners are often stricken with salmonella poisoning from a bacteria carried by their best buds. In fact, it's more likely you'll get sick from **salmonella** than injured from your snake's bite.
- 6 By now you're probably wondering if **handling** a boa constrictor is even safe? Not really. If you put your hand near a boa and it smells like prey or gets startled, you're likely to get a sharp surprise. Don't worry too much about those jagged, hooked teeth in your hand. At least there's no venom! And every now and then they let go right away instead of holding on, and on, and on.
- 7 If you do build up the courage to hold your boa, you should know something first. Reptile brains are different from the brains of mammals like humans, dogs, and cats. Dogs jump for joy when their owners return from work or school. They're glad you're back. Cats enjoy cuddling on your lap or chasing strings around. Your boa won't do any of that. He might recognize you. He might **tolerate** your handling. He just won't ever love you. He can't.
- 8 And do you know how long he won't love you? For close to 30 years because that is how long boas held in captivity live. There you'll be--a slave to a pet who has come to tolerate you. Three **decades** of daily toilet/water bowl cleaning, habitual hand-washing to avoid salmonella germs, an occasional bite, weekly trips to the store selecting which dinner deserves to die, and constant tank **surveillance** to keep the temperature and humidity in his home just right. Does that baby boa sound like such a great idea now?

Cases of Reptile Related Salmonella Poisoning Reported to CDC, Summer 2014



*2014 data from the CDC (Center for Disease Control)